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The Director of Central Intelligence
Washington, D.C. 20505

National Intelligence Council

NIC #00763-85
11 February 1985

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH: Chairman, National Intelligence Council
Vice Chairman, National Intelligence Council

FROM: Fritz W. Ermarth
National Intelligence Officer for USSR

SUBJECT: Sarbanes' and Solarz's Case Against Contra Aid

1. On Bob Gates' behalf I attended a weekend conference at Wye Plantation on US-Soviet relations, organized by ex-Senator Dick Clark and attended by a few significant policymakers (Ken Dam was the most senior) and members of Congress. One item worth reporting now is the argument made by Sarbanes and Solarz against Contra aid:

The Contras can't win. They cannot overthrow the Sandinistas and, short of winning, the pressure they put on the Sandinistas actually reinforces totalitarian measures. Hence our pluralization objectives are not served.

Diplomacy, i.e., Contadora, should be "given a chance" to achieve our other objectives, namely, blocking Nicaragua's export of revolution and becoming a Soviet base. Although we cannot guarantee success, we might achieve it.

If we got an acceptable agreement and the Sandinista's violated it later, the Administration would have a much better chance of mobilizing public support for stronger measures.

2. Solarz made the paradoxical argument that the Contras don't really pressure the Sandinistas; rather it is the credible prospect of direct US military intervention that pressures them. And since the Contras cannot win, we'll have to follow up aid with direct intervention. But direct intervention would be next to intolerable politically (one wonders how it can therefore be a credible source of pressure).

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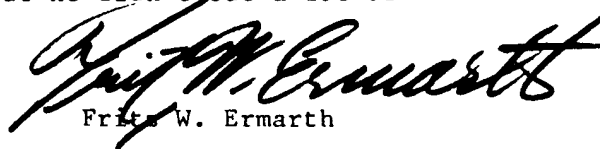
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3. Ken Dam did not rebut this line of argument, perhaps because the setting did not make that worthwhile. I was asked directly about the degree of Soviet/Cuban involvement. I cited Bayardo Arce's speech as proof that the Sandinistas are committed to Leninist dictatorship, export of revolution and strategic ties with Havana and Moscow, while concealing their aims behind "elections" and "negotiations." I said there was convincing evidence that the Soviets and Cubans basically support this line. (I neglected to make the point that Arce also credited pressure from the Contras as obliging the Sandinistas to create the figleaf of elections.)

4. Interestingly, Sarbanes and Solarz did not make a moralistic case against Contra aid, or refer to the legacy of past actions or executive-legislative interactions on it. It sounded like they were trying, whatever their real beliefs, to make the "hardheaded" case against further aid, perhaps for Dam's benefit.

5. Rep. Doug Bereuter (R-Nebraska) argued for a diplomacy track, but continuing Contra aid until the best possible deal was nailed down. Rep. Toby Roth (R-Wisc) seemed to be the strongest vote for doing whatever necessary to stop communism in our hemisphere, but he didn't cut a lot of ice.



Fritz W. Ermarth

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